Prabodh Shukla

He was born in 1951 in a village in Hardoi, UP, India. He received his early education there and a PhD in Physics from the Temple University, Philadelphia, USA in 1975. He held two postdoctoral appointments, at the University of Oxford, England and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in the USA before joining the faculty of North Eastern Hill University at Shillong in India in 1979. After a long tenure of teaching, research, and academic administration, he retired in 2016 and now lives in Lucknow, a city closer to his roots.

Poems Written on a Whim

Prabodh Shukla

Poems
Written On A Whim

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DEDICATION

To my parents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Surjit Singh, my one time colleague, coauthor of research papers in physics, and long time friend for almost ordering me to put my occasional musings and whims into a more organized form. I believe he did it solely to help me come out of a lazy "sleep eighteen hours a day" style of life into which I had lapsed after retirement and the general siege of normal life by Covid-19. It helped me to carry on in spite of things looking unexciting, dull, and difficult.

Almost all the verses in this collection were composed in the preceding year and shared initially with friends on Facebook. I acknowledge their encouragement as well when I had my own doubts of various kinds. In spite of the stark poverty of rhyme in my poems they saw some reason to encourage me. It is great to have such friends.

Prabodh Shukla

Lucknow, UP, India

December 2023

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PREFACE

I never imagined I would write a book of poems. In the misty and heady days of High School I loved to read poetry and was often moved by it. I did not understand it fully but enjoyed it. It freed me of stress and brought some fulfilment even if I did not understand it. This quality was not shared by physics and mathematics which created mental frustration unless issues were resolved thoroughly. Occasionally I penned down a few lines almost involuntarily and thought them to be poetry although I never consulted anyone. Unfortunately they have been mysteriously lost like the diaries of my adolescence.

The lure to write short text unconstrained by grammar and rigors of logic never really left me. It resurfaced after retirement, particularly during lock downs of Covid-19, in the form of brief posts on Facebook. A friend encouraged me to write more often and I was happy to do so. Unlike scientific writing, it is such fun to write assorted things out of box without the burden of proposing a theory or proof or scrutiny of referees. Yet it would be a sacrilege to my professional training to disregard a scientific point of view on various issues. This constant awareness bestows the following collection of poems a largely unexplored genre. The real purpose of any composition is to release the author rather than to please the audience. Still if my jottings touch the imagination of a few the purpose of this publication is well served.

POEMS

OF SADNESS AND HOPE:

Kids I knew
And students as well
Left these shores
Travels I thought
But no, gone for ever.
I miss them so bad
So sad.
May my country prosper
So nobody leaves ever
For bread and butter.

BROKEN SYMMETRY ON EARTH

We know though
Flat Earth guys may not
It is like an orange
One spot on it should be
Like any other spot
But New York is different
From New Delhi
Visas and passports
And different currencies
Why this broken symmetry?

MONSOONS

We read in books
Dreamy damsels on swings
Tramps of hoofs to
Poets of foreign looks.
Now yearly janitors
Of choked sewers
Uncover filth and disease
Spread it around
And sweep it down
Rivers once clean.

BOREDOM

Nature had no intention
Some men made invention
A state of redemption
Not hunting and gathering but
Wishful thinking and dreaming.
To be fed on time like pets
Sleep eat and sleep again
No worries and regrets
But emptiness it begets.

ONLINE

Internet impersonal
Algorithm lifeless
Does compensate
Past pleasures
Of dates and quarrels
Her mischievous smiles.
Like a whirlwind it blows
Hourly something new grows
But the past is preserved
You'll find if you care
The footprints on
Silicons of our time.

LIFE EVENTS

Sons grow into men
Before sires know it
Or even them.
Not so wonderful
As you may think
Things need time to sink.
One loses a kingdom
Other a princehood
Looking for a livelihood.
World does not see
By one's papa's eyes
You must work your rise.

POLITICALLY INCORRECT

Justice was once blind
It was same for everyone
Judges were like lotus flowers
Saviors of muddy waters
Things seem different now
Names and faces do matter
They look at them and
Look at them again
Not blind servants of law
Previledged offsprings of
Privileged forefathers.
The spirit of law
Simple and clear
Lost to technicalities
Understood and explained only
By expensive barristers
Of questionable characters.
An honorable lord thinks it legal
Another says no never
Ranks are pulled to decide
Who matters.
It is no rocket science why
You can not legally criticise
Even if judgements collide
Colonial vestiges perhaps.
But there is hope
Make a jury of twelve or more
Unpriviledged ordinary folks
Unpolished and crude
Honest poor good true
Dalits and the forgotten too
Dropouts failed and fallen
Let them apply their mind
Why people should judge
People different from them

Mistakes we may make
But that we shall take.

DANCE OF SHIVA

Fist ful of minerals
And water
Amazing living matter
It yearns and learns
Loves with passion then
Destroys what it loves
Its own creation with
Hate conflicts and wars
Ending it all.
I wonder when I ponder
The purpose of this waste
Is it a theater for
Repeat performances of
Kaal-Chakra The Tandava
Perpetual Dance of Shiva.

HUMANS

Quietly and gently
Molecule by molecule
Life forms itself
Inside a womb egg or seed
No difference indeed.
Human species
Exalt in vain arrogance
Palaces and silver spoons
Pity births in mangers
And dimly lit rooms
Make such fuss
Over what they achieve
Or do not achieve.
Nature has the last laugh
If indeed she has humor
When the time comes
She puts them gently to sleep Gunga Din or Alexander
No matter.

LONELINESS

Worse than a fearful dream [1]
That ruthlessly repeats itself
Though the flesh crawls at the thought
We have to go through it
Everytime till we scream
Condemned to suffer
What we do not understand.

Worse than this
Are the shapeless fears
Memories of old times
Quite ordinary events
Buried without rites
They arise from the dead
Take grotesque forms
And helpless I follow them
Till my knees have no strength.

Eyes cannot see
Mind cannot think
No help I can reach
All alone
I bear it all
The weaknesses of my heart
The curse of things
That I do not understand.

1June 5, 1980

VICE CHANCELLOR

No freedom
Everything scheduled
Day formatted
Meetings, committees, appointments
Agenda, discussions, resolutions
Inaugurations, valedictory functions
Banquets.
Perchance denouncements
Protests Slogans Blockades
Two faces of same hollowness
Loud talk little thought
In reality nothing.
Creativity crushed by
Customs Institutions
But the exuberance of youth
Some will learn
Even if we fail to teach
Irrepressible life
Will sprout somewhere
We will hear it whisper
See it bloom and shine
And it will be
As it is meant to be.

MALL

Scorching sun[2]
Trees all gone
Malls the only shelter
Unreal or surreal
No grown ups
Only our children
In foreign clothes and manners
Girls young and thin as twigs
Impatient to expand
Boys pretending men
Joining tables for girls
Birthday parties apparently
I munch on a chicken leg
Overstaying their patience
A soft tap on my shoulder
Uncle can we share your table
Yes of course
You are welcome too.

2 Sept 9, 2021

INDEPENDENCE DAY

I made morning coffee
And turned on the radio
And turned it off again
Been there done that
Hoisting flags and speeches
No enthusiasm it now brings
Just another day.
It hit me later though
When I stepped outside
Saw children in uniforms
Like a patch of blue sky
No school bags on their backs
Kicking around with joy
Jostling and laughing
Giggling for no reason at all
Reminding me what it is
I have lost over the years
Childhood refractory
Joy of occasions and festivals.

PROFESSOR

Tenure at a university is
The best life I can imagine
To be paid and rewarded
For things you'd anyway do.
Be at liberty high
Wear a suit and tie
Wrinkled shirts and jeans
Carry a small backpack
Nobody will raise an eye.
Guards of honour may not
Await you when you reach
Ports new but back home
Where you taught
Admiring men and women
Would remember you
Place you on a pedestal.
Best of all other things
You'd explore your fields
Without let or hindrance
Trolls threats reprimands
You may think differently
But would be accepted still.
It's the crowning glory
Of your profession that
Inspires professions
The job of jobs.

SARASWATI

Dearest muse of learning
Arts songs and dreams
Give us a scholar again.
Politicians we have plenty
Rich businessmen too
Building malls and resorts
For entertainment yes
Contentment no.
Men of medicines we have
And vaccines too and
Rockets that fit our budget
Alas it has been long time
We had a poet of substance
Storyteller of grassroots
Sweeping us off our feet
To pastures forgotten
Vision sans television.
My heart yearns
For that revision.

PERSONALITIES

There are all sorts around
Some amuse us
With selfies fresh
Updating profiles
Feeling good on facebook
Their faces look fine.
Some are seething
For unfortunate people
Daily tromped without sound
They agonise in their mind
What holds revolution behind.
These are all fine but
There are real scares offline
They may look normal
With education and promise
But hibernate in their mind
Rapes and brutal raggings
Certainly a sickness of mind
Shame for mankind but
We don't know what to do
With this kind.

AANCHAL

Not just the last yard of cloth
Of a seven yard saree
Hanging down the shoulder or
A two yard light scarf of
Women from the Punjab
Who do not wear a saree.
It is the soul of this land
There is not an Indian born
With heart so dead
That it does not remember
Comforted by an aanchal
When bruised by a fall or
Sheltered from things
It didn't want to see.
It is mother's love and
Blessings and protection
Fom evil eyes all life long.

INDIAN MARRIAGES

They were made in heaven
In not too distant past
Pundits were consulted
Horoscopes were matched
Married if they matched
The stars decided it all
Brides and grooms mere
Strangers who didn't matter.
Times have changed now
We think we're westernized
Boys meet girls and mingle
Still it is not so simple
Parties and blasts don't last
They click on data bases
Various marriages dot com
Surprisingly it clicks
More often than not
Strange it may sound
We changed but
Remained the same.
Parting thought I may name
Money too didn't change
It was important then as is now
Dowry maybe gone but
People like to splash
Beyond the threshold
They can afford.

WALKS IN LUCKNOW TOWN

Occasionally
Without mission
I leave home
To walk in Lucknow town.
City is short of adequate shelter
So pavements are preoccupied
I walk on the main road
Sweat clouding my eyes
I wade potholes and crack pots
Driving two and four wheels
Crazy like me nearly scraping me
Risking life to them all the while
I return home and take a shower
Why I do this is not known to me.

PHYSICS

This lovely muse is to life
What spice is to taste or
Flavour to a beer
The joy of knowing cycles
Why night must kill a day and
Bring forth a new day everyday
Why monsoons must follow
Every gruelling summer why
We've two tides in a lunar day
It hasn't told us all its stories yet
Keeps me constantly fascinated
Why she has to make atoms
How she makes them
Each one exactly the same.

FACEBOOK

Symbol of free world
Do post what's on your mind
You post they post
Return posts come in no time
You can comment and react
Like care unfriend and block
Many emotions in stock
You may get a good shock
Influencers strive hard
Despite trolls on card
It's only a bubble sweetheart
Outsiders don't give a fart
Why then we not fret so hard
Enjoy the technology
Without spreading ideology.

TRUTH AND JUSTICE

Truth is shattered
Justice high jacked
We are naked
It fell down and broke
Fragments may fight wars
Settle who triumphs
Perchance they may know
They are of same body
Live in harmony
We don't know
It may have been an illusion
A human invention
Its companion too
High jacked by broken pieces.

UPANISHAD STORY RETOLD

Gods won a war so
Great reveling celebration
When a Yaksha appeared
The god of fire met him
Who're you Yaksha asked
I'm the god of fire
I can burn anything I desire
Burn this blade of grass
And god of fire couldn't
Dejected he returned to Indra
King of gods to investigate
Yaksha hid from Indra
A pretty woman took his place
Modestly he asked the woman
That was Brahma she said
You fool he is the one
Who won the war for you.

SQUALL

A squall last night threw me[3]
In forgotten memory woods
Holding a torch light .
Big for small hands
In a dark but safe orchard
Picking fallen mangoes.
Is it an omen
Is it time to be born again.

3 June 1, 2023

HURT WATER

Fallen from snowy peaks
Hit by pebbles rocks
Landslides vegetation
Human filth above all
It endures its hurts
Recovers momentarily
Quietly flows again
Till the sea ends its misery
Only to be born again
No different from us all.

CHANDRAYAAN

There's thrill in the air
It has returned again
Paper planes boats
Launch them
Watch them reach there
What's more
Girls are joining us
Joyous even more.

NEWTON'S DRAW

Summer's late morning sun
Falls on bedroom curtains
Giving them an iridescent glow
I love to remain in bed awake
Make plans for the day
They meander gently around
Excuses distractions naps
Morning thoughts yield to
Liquefaction evaporation
Beer appears in the evening
I rue the loss of a day but I fear
When Newton said you hear
Retirement was all ear
Nothing changes its course
Unless kicked by external force
So I rest my case.

FULL MOON NIGHT

Tonight
A huge disk of moon
The other side of town
No city lights around
Brought to mind
Forgotten times
Holding her hand gently
For the first time.

POETRY FATIGUE

Indulgence in prose
Slumped me to poems
Thirty poems now
Poetry fatigue I have
Fear I can't write proper
Do useful business
Think straight
Call it right
Coffee is cold
Toast is hot
"Papa papa pity take
I will no more verses make".

CYCLES

Cycles are the soul of
Nature's algorithms
She thrives on them
As night follows day
Day in and day out
We her children too
Love life of rotations
Till death do us part
Is just wishful thinking
A forced sentencing
Married or single
Programmed we are to
Love unlove and love again.

DEW DROPS

Condensing slowly in
Huddle of cold nights
Evaporating gently in
Bustle of warm mornings
So are my longings
Soothing in mind
Shattered outside by
Demands of life
Reality of things.

TRAVELS

Hotels
Smell of starch on
Stiff bedsheets
Sterile bathrooms
Blank faces in corridors
Painted smiles at reception
Bars without souls
Mysterious why I leave
The warmth of a house
That I love and it offers
Everything I wish.

DISTANCES

They exist
In our minds as well
Different from positions
In space and time
Words exchanged
Feelings hurt
Love waned
No Newtonian motion
Force and acceleration
Spontaneous creation
Sadness and separation
Time causes time may heal
We don't know.

SUMMER LEAVING

I heard her whisper
Not loud but clear
Bear some more
Not long before
I'll be gone
You're wary now
Of sweat and heat
You'd long for it later
In your bonfire retreat
Knowing what it is
To be alone again.

GROWING OLD

Often I travel
In my own house
Reach a destination
Unaware why I arrived there
Short term memory loss
Is was doctors call it
Quite amused I become
Think it's nature's way to
Exercise a body without
Stressing the mind
In this age so kind.

MOISTURE IN MY EYES

Scarce now nonetheless
In times hard and helpless
Eases desolation
Offers consolation
Strength to stay along
Loved one's suffering
Defying resources and will
Accepting human limitation
Thoughts wander to wistful
Plays and places we made
Quarrelled but stayed
Unable to assemble words
Body and mind freeze
Wet eyes speak
Beseech and entreat
Ruthless trap of time
It offers no retreat.

PARTIES (SOCIALS) IN INDIA

Some of us who have lived in
Foreign lands enjoyed parties
Getting together drinking
Cooking eating picnics too
Occasionally sleeping over
Drunk or tired to drive back
We long for that fun again
They do have socials here
Spend a lot of money
Invite huge gatherings
Great pomp and show
Devoid of enjoyment though
Only to mark an occasion
Birthday engagement wedding
A long awaited promotion
Showcase for ladies dressing
Ritual for gathering gifts
Often just cash in envelopes
You we gave you return now
Huddles for photo sessions
Food photographed as well
Small talks no conversation
Blessed are the unmarried
They are not force ferried
In crowds of mostly married.

NEW PROFESSORS

Our custodians of education
Decreed new subjects be taught
Creating new knowledge sadly
Confused by nomenclature
Decades ago they ordained
Professors of energy
Selectors and candidates
Who didn't know much physics
They became experts in energy
What is energy they were asked
Capacity for work they replied
Coal water wind and electricity
True but wonder what new have
Departments of energy brought
Several decades into it now
Undaunted they're looking for
Professors of practice now
Hope students are not used
Just for practice.

HEAT

Its physics is simple but funny [4]
You sense but eyes do not see
Grab something say cup of tea
Hot or cold it may feel
Hold on to it long if you can
Equal temperature appears
That sensation disappears
Heat in biology
Seems more of a mystery
He and she holding tight
Through the night
Both may heat together
It's puzzling if you think
Mama physics rules everything
You me tea or anything.

4 PS: this work was made possible by professor toofani publishers advice; when hit by author's block turn to seven topics learned in high school physics.

HARDLY ANY MATTER

Vast expanse of universe but
Emptiness most everywhere
Hardly any visible matter
Hydrogen here and there
Our planet sun human chatter
Farcical aberrations they are
Specks of dirt on clean platter
Ourselves we flatter
Why should I care
What difference does it make
In unbounded wilderness
A planet tiny spinning crazy
How does it matter.

EMOTIONS.

They're of course atoms doings
Hiding in hormones flowing
Physics is thus veiled here
What governs anger and fear
Why we hate it or hold it dear
What brings both eyes to tear
Laws unclear that on it bear
Poets say not your concern
As if they can really discern
More than physics can churn.

CLOCK OF LIFE

A circular trail I took
I see it there behind me
People places events I met
Flash back to remind me
I had it all in parents care but
Sent to college to refine me
Food house a bit of money
I managed here to define me
Full around clock have I come
Took some time to unwind me
Unsure still I'm of the purpose
Nature so assigned me.

LIVING STATE

It is a dream
Our atoms shall awake
Be free again from bonds
Roam for aeons
They may reincarnate
Other forms and norms
Into a different dream.

DETAILED BALANCE

Principle of detailed balance
Is how nature tallies
Its accounts balance sheets
Not just bottom lines but
Transaction by transaction
Maintains equilibrium
Not tranquility you may think
But a state of constant agitation
Conceals much in this action
Only Einstein could discern
Makings of a laser
Before it could function.

LOSS OF INFORMATION

Nature apparently forgets
How it reached where it arrived
Whether three atoms
Combined with one
Or two with two
Molecule of four it stores
It causes by necessity
Loss of information
Increase in entropy
She is happy with that
Darned if I know why.

WINTER COMING

Sizzling heat is fizzling out
Evening sun is hemmed
Birds in parks
Their dine outs cut short
Returning to nests early
Wonderful it must be
Minimal housing in a tree
A tiny bed but cozy
No artificial lights
Blinking phones either
Sleep long and tight
Till the sun comes out
Pretending poet as well
Advanced his evening beer
By an hour to call it a day.

RIVER WATER

You may hit it with pebbles
It would suffer silently
Hurt and pained it'll flow
Tranquil again after a while
It has a larger mission
Beyond your individual vanity
If you ever have tears in eyes
You may sit by its side
Touch it gently and it'll
Stop momentarily for you
Comfort you and reveal why
It flows ever so steadily.

MINI DESIDERETA

They'd know you by
What you say and how
Explain if you understand
Simplify but not cheat
Around bush do not beat
Not speak if nothing to say
Be kind and gentle to them
Who are not same as you
Accommodate and tolerate
Poetry is delicate
Don't pontificate.

HARTALIKA VRAT

This evening I hear
In our vast land of great
Antiquity and mystery
Women thousands of them
Observed a fast most terrible
Passed twenty four hours
No food no water just air
Longer life for husbands
Was their hidden desire
One day yearly this action
Undoes rest of days of fire
I hope I don't incur any ire
It's serious matter no satire.

MORNING WALK

Not the easiest of things
Leaving the warmth of bed
That comforted you all night
But it rewards if you can fight
Refreshes the soul as
Sleep refreshes the body
Simple pleasures of life
Are blessings true
Day's errands merely details.

DEMOCRACY

A lovely idea born in Athens
Five centuries before Christ
Now spread far and wide
Feels good we the people
Choose our government but
Doubt if all feel good at all times
Even Athenians had flaws
Left slaves women children
Plus what they called noncitizen
Flaws many still remain
Only changed their name
Not perfect but all the same
Better than any other game.

WHO ARE WE INDIANS

Quarrelsome argumentative[5]
Often confused ourselves
We don't rightly know
Persians called us hindus
British colonized and thought
We were men of straw
Americans defeated us and
Confined to their reservations
Things in common we do have
As seen by foreign eyes
Mixed complexion
Complex religion
Cast creed tribes too many
Explained to us by them zany
Can we stand up take our place
Unifluenced by the white race.

5 Inspired by Bindu A.Bambah who is often telling me it's brown vs white stupid.

FRAGRANCE OF CUT GRASS

I overslept this morning's walk
Evening offered another chance
Park mowed freshly off chance
Lured ground reconnaissance
Scent in the air was on a dance
Intoxicating new fragrance
Masculine upkeep did enhance
Undulating feminine stance
Like a woman from France
It put me in a trance
Memory of wistful romance
Escorted me by chance.

ELECTRICITY

I don't have in mind
Faraday and Franklin kind
The bills we monthly find
My concern is another form
So gentle it doesn't shock
But keeps our life in lock
We don't pay for it except
Food and drink in stock
The issue is we are atoms
Opposite charges that bind
Their motions comprise
Electricity everywhere we find
Tiny coordinated movements
A symphony of electricity
Charged fabric in spacetime
Such delicate fragile network
We die if it gets torn.

A NOTHING EVENT

Radio was playing
A song from the sixties
I thought I recognized it
From a high school movie
But I couldn't recall the
Actress behind the song
Thought and thought
Finally remembered and thus
Discovered brain embeds
Audio in video entangled
Not separate sound tracks Alongside picture frames
As seen in old movie reels
Now I know and you do too.

NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK

Gone are the days when
Indians kids respected age
Put their minds to reflect
Listened to views alternate
Now listening is so yesterday
They merely hear to repudiate
Demand compliance or agitate
No differing with grace
Angry as if something owed
Must be returned to them
Life so changed in our nest
Chicks act they know best
Oldies are afraid to protest
But why I should detest
It'd be nice if they fly high
Nitwithstanding my decry.

FORTNIGHT OF ANCESTORS

Commencing tomorrow is
Indian fortnight of ancestors
As the full moon starts waning
Faithful will be shunning
Indulgence and merrymaking
Marriage or such celebrating
Departed souls will be visiting
We'll be sad and reminiscing
Businesses will take a hitting
Rise again nine days following
The new moon waxing
Festivities will be returning
Who knows obscure reasoning
Customs of practitioners willing
In remembrance I'll be travelling
Some place my parents took me
When I was small and growing.

DOGS DON'T INVENT GODS

it's truly mind boggling
Seeing dogs deliver puppies
No midwives in the offing
Nor mothers advising
In secluded places withdrawing
At peace with what's coming
Although not clearly knowing
Peace with nature and trusting
Same poise they maybe keeping
With death approaching
Unlike humans always fussing
Education seems superfluous
Intuition is quite enough
Humanity makes up things
Its insecurity not necessity.

CHITRAKOOT

A most ancient place
One time a dense forest
Rama was exiled here for
Years ten and four
Tulsidass wrote about him
Sitting by Mandakini river
Where they all did bathe
A story so popular here
People still recite the hymns
Every day every hour
You can ask Google knows
I walked by the river
To find a secluded place
To bathe my feet
Two young men discovered me
No I don't want a boat
No I don't want a car
You are fortunate how so
Rama's brother Bharath
The reluctant king
Never went anywhere
Except came here to take his
Brother's wooden sandals
To rule his kingdom in place
You too have good karma
Need not wander any more.

ODE TO DOGS

Nature's saintly creatures
Manifest all known features
Of seers savants and sages
Incarnated for humanity
Lessons in great renunciation
No houses do they make
Live only on alms they take
Hardly sleep for their sake
Slightest hint they're awake
Humans steal their puppies
They put up with such bullies
Geeks may dislike such praise
Facebook's users have faults
Yodhisthira wasn't online but
We hear he knew dharma well
He too once fell for the thought
It is merely a dog he thought
Ha ha ha Oh My God.

TAMASHAS IN MY LAND

Lucknow Metro
Cleanest of its kind
Yesterday morning
They lost their mind
Cleaners were watching
Supervisors and officers
Parading with new brooms
One broomer so distinguished
I asked what tamasha is this
National cleanliness day
I'm donating one hour of time
Tains come every five minutes
Enough time so I estimated
They must have bought
Hundred thousand brooms
Who would clean them
After the hour of cleanliness.

EASTERN THOUGHTS

In pain we're born
Although in joy conceived
We puzzle all life long
Even if it doesn't last that long
Restless desperately forlorn
Mired in maya that sticks
Eightfold Buddha gives a fix
Answers we desire to find
They don't blow in the wind
Latent in our troubled mind
Are paths for each kind
Renunciation meditation
Quiet contemplation make
The self realization grind.

ATTOSECONDS

Vision persists on ratina [6]
A millisecond or so
Changing frames quicker
Creates illusion of motion
That's how movies work
Key to photography is the
Time camera shutter is open
Frames can move faster in
Steady light or use strobe to
Light objects moving faster
Physics laureates this year
Made strobe lights quicker than
One billionth of billionth second
Photos of electrons jumping
Between energy states in atoms
Things were not possible earlier
Principles were known
Superposition of waves of
High frequencies mixed
Create a train of light pulses
Short and strong spikes
They've now achieved this
A great technological feat
But also a worrying thought
Experiments are very costly
Most researchers can't repeat
Discovering a personal thrill
Now reduced to teamwork
Thrill is diluted if not vanished
It's a technical satisfaction now
Sustained execution of project
Otherwise who'd care to know
What can happen in attosecond
No issue with technology

6 (caution: minimally long narration)

A prize in that field will inspire
More than one in economics
But it shouldn't be at cost of
Physics or chemistry.

IRRITATED PEOPLE IRRITATING

Why can't they be like us
Or God forbid we like them
Differences are often annoying
Some hate television
Others can't do without it
Seems true of Facebook too
Only half the people I know
Use it or misuse in own ways
Search and post memes to
Facilitate love or hate someone
Needling each other imagining
Catalysts of change they are
For the new times coming
Some men find it so low brow
Ask wives check it for them
Other men post pictures of
Gorgeous wives they have
As if anybody likes or cares
Publicly post items perhaps
Appropriate for beds indoors
Wives often use the platform
Wishing hbd to their kind
Bits of these things I am too
Irritated irritating and crazy.

SNAIL'S PACE

Physics often surprises
Outside our experiences old
New centerfolds we behold
Thus spacetime isn't same
Fast as photons if we move
Death is rare if it's there
For tiny electrons and weird
Light acts near a black hole
Ideas strange in human brain
Bear out in clever experiments
Imagine a world funny where
All move at snail's pace
I fancied being a snail and
Knew immediately I'll carry
House on my back everywhere
I go and I saw it true in reels
Of snails I watched but alas
One reel showed a snake
Suck out a snail from its shell
That made me very sad
Anyway if an electron
Moves at a pace of snail
What would it entail
Nature hasn't taken us yet
Down this unknown trail.

EMPTINESS EVERYWHERE

Emptiness seems an element
In universe's construction
For years light travels alone
Before it encounters an atom
And finds it almost empty
We fill it with imagination
What truth do we hide
Is it a newly built house
Awaiting furniture or
Space for juggling spheres
Keep entropy increasing
Clever fools we truly are
Nothing we really know
Space may be required for
Conciousness to grow
Effectiveness of emptiness
Like dilution in homeopathy
Ridiculed as medicine empty
Some believe it works plenty.

AN ORDINARY DAY

Yesterday I thought
Was an ordinary day
Late breakfast and siesta
A bit of evening pasta
Two glasses of red wine
My day was fine
Perspectives can be skewed
Walls of Israel were breached
Intruders plundered
Asian games saw Indians
Win over a hundred medals
Next only to Chinese
Koreans and Japanese
Not so much the numbers
That may easily enhance
Hope our kids are inspired by
Performance and delivery
Rather skin colors fashions
Shapes of features
Food what Hollywood serves
They relish and thrive on it
Mother nature was unhappy
Somewhere on Afghan hills
And silly me unshaken
Thought it was an ordinary day.

INDIAN PRETENDERS

Occasionally I get irritated
With my compatriots for
Things I'd otherwise defend
If someone else said them
Electioneering campaigns
Are what're bugging me
But the point is more subtle
Let me give an old example
Girlish Karnad was a man in
Indian cinema that I admired
But they made a series of
Science films asked him to act
As if he had done the science
It bugged me to think what
Message it'd send to
Impressionable kid's minds
When we have hundreds
Who really knew the science
Without further ado I now find Thousands around who know
How to run the country better
But who's stopping them
They only lecture but add
Politics is too dirty to enter.

WORLD AFFAIRS

Events of recent days
Physically didn't touch me
But scenes very disturbing
Traumatic to see
Dead bodies scattered
Violated unawares dancing
Brutal invaders revelling
Ofcourse it can't end there Revenge has to play out
A town bombed to rubble
No shelter food or water
Motherless babies crying
Lesson for terrorists alright
No joy for innocents I find.

NEW WORLD WHERE

Doubts cloud my mind
If it is a new world after
World war one and two
Old powers run the show
They call it democracy now
But hold on to a veto
Offering sops to join them
And you know too
You can't beat them
As things stand now

NEW MUSLIMS

Ofcourse there are none
That is perhaps the issue
A thousand years ago
Somewhere in arabia
One tribe defeated another
Attributed their victory to
Their book and prophet
Peace be upon him
They spread the message
Far beyond their sands
Not fully appreciating
There are other people
They too have their gods
And think highly of them
Now if they were to lose
A real war hard and true
Would they accept other gods
And return to sea of humanity.

FICKLENESS OF LIFE

Facebook after covid
Changed life so much
Some folks I never met
Became happy acquaintances
Information technology
Produced emotional rheology
A person online I met
Posted distracted reacted
Few days ago he toasted
May the river flow happily
May the forest thrive
He's no more to be contacted
Is this how in future we'd
Meet and part sans rituals
No hellos meetings grievings
I went through day's chores
Strangely confounded
How extraordinary it is
Life continues after people
Vanish like pebbles dropped
In the rivers of our thought.

HUGE DIVERSITY OF INDIA

A milestone has arrived
I pause my whims and poems
Dip now in mundane waters
Crazy town and country
That I love all the same
No way my narrations
Could speak for everyone
I couldn't describe an elephant
Standing so close to it
Desparate are diversities here
A few as rich as anywhere
Very poor folks as well
Trying to make ends meet
A billion in between
Each one his own philosopher
Knows exactly the
Disease and the medicine
I don't mostly believe them
But I am a part of them
Irritated and inspired
Often and not so often
Whims I have shared with you.

SALAAM LUCKNOW

More than a million people [7]
Yet it feels like home cozy
Streets unfriendly for walks
For reasons so many but
Rickshaws nearby my house
Slow down alongside me
Uncle I can drop you home
I know where you live
No I'm fine just walking
Street food is truly great
No charge for friendly chat
You stand around a cart
Have masala chai or chaat
Roasted corn on cob
Scrape the carbon off
With a salted lemon slice
If fancy dining like a nawab
Exquisite food and places
City of fragrant manners
Inhabitants fly its banners.

7 (supernumerary for good measure 😊)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Prabodh Shukla was born in 1951 in a village in Hardoi, UP, India. He received his early education there and a PhD in Physics from the Temple University, Philadelphia, USA in 1975. He held two postdoctoral appointments, at the University of Oxford, England and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in the USA before joining the faculty of North Eastern Hill University at Shillong in India in 1979. After a long tenure of teaching, research, and academic administration, he retired in 2016 and now lives in Lucknow, a city closer to his roots.

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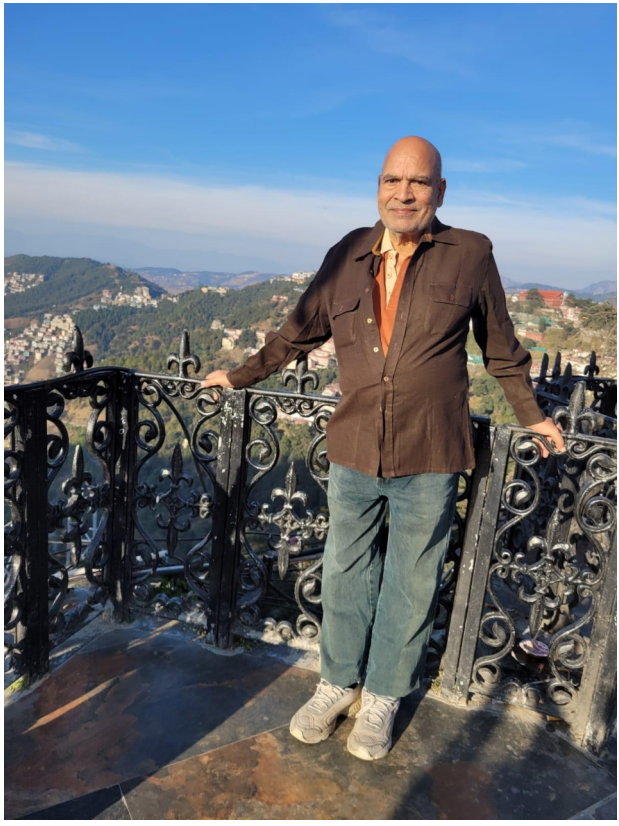

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